

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
EMERGENCY JOINT MEETING MINUTES
BOARD OF SELECTMEN & ADVISORY BOARD
MAY 1, 2008
SENIOR CENTER – VMS BUILDING**

This was an Emergency Joint Meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Board.

PRESENT: Selectmen Chris Gagnon and Maggie Whitney, Paul Boushell, Town Administrator, Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Also Advisory Board members Bill Johnson, Chair, Dottie Munroe, Leo Janssens, Jamie Piedrafite, Frank Lombardo and Marie Zbikowski.

Johnson began by stating that they were meeting to discuss the recent events regarding the School budget. Boushell explained that there was an oversight in the School budget number but that it was fixed, basically the same solution of any other time in the budget process.

Gagnon noted his concern that the numbers were corrected. Johnson inquired about the Transportation and Community Service numbers and where they were accounted for and Boushell stated that this could be amended on Town Meeting floor and that the Debt Assessment was the only concern that the School had and this would be fixed.

Johnson stated that this was not a viable solution but that he was not assessing any blame. Gagnon suggested taking out the new cruiser, the paramedic and the 3% COLA from the budget to correct this oversight. He noted that the ALS EMT person has been put off for 1 more year so there was no need to hurry this year to hire the additional personnel. He also stated that it may be time to start talking about the Fire Department budget and ways to stabilize it. Janssens agreed stating that they should hold off on the EMT, the cruiser and the COLA's until the fall as it seems that they are moving forward too quickly.

Gagnon stated that in his opinion it would be wise for this year to continue to go forward with the budget but to be conservative right now.

Johnson stated that the EMT was \$51k, the cruiser was \$34k and the COLA was approximately \$52k for a total of \$137k which may not be enough to cover this shortfall. At this time Boushell explained what could happen with the COLA's taken out for the non-union personnel. He noted that unions could be formed and this would cause more negotiations for the Town.

Gagnon stated that talks with the School should be done during their budget cycle and he recommended that this be done in January or February to be fair. Johnson stated that it should be sooner and that they should be notified in July or August about any possibility that the Prop 2 ½ plus growth may be changed. Janssens agreed with this.

Johnson noted that this \$137k cut would allow more flexibility to revisit later. Gagnon stated that they would still be \$132k short to cover the Transportation amount for the School. The process of certifying Free Cash was discussed and Boushell noted that this process would be

accelerated and he also noted that it should be more than the \$7k balance of this year. Boushell noted that the reason Free Cash was so low at this time was because a lot was done in the fall.

Boushell again noted his concern regarding the COLA's being taken away from the Non-Union Personnel and the fact that this could lead to unionizing if not taken care of. Gagnon stated that they could prioritize any found money in September. Lombardo inquired if this would be a priority and Janssens stated that it should.

Lombardo stated that it is important to state to the Town that instead of cutting personnel they are cutting the COLA's. Gagnon stated that they need to continue to evaluate this and then in September they could prioritize things. Johnson stated that he didn't see things getting better.

Gagnon noted that the VMS Building would be a concern in this next year and a short discussion followed on the plans for this if it goes forward.

Janssens motioned for the Advisory Board to recommend cutting the 3% COLA, the cruiser and the paramedic from the FY09 Budget and was seconded by Lombardo. Five voted aye and Marie Zbikowski abstained.

Maggie Whitney motioned for the Board of Selectmen to cut the 3% COLA, the cruiser and the paramedic out of the FY09 Budget and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Boushell asked that both boards make this a priority for the fall and both boards stated that they would. Gagnon noted that he hoped to see that the budget is in better shape by then.

Johnson and Whitney both voiced their wish to start the budget process earlier. Gagnon agreed and added that he wants to meet quarterly with everyone including Department Heads to discuss their needs and fund balances every quarter. Boushell stated that they were moving in the right direction.

At this time the Advisory Board reviewed the ATM Warrant Articles. Bill Johnson read each article. At Article 9, Lombardo stated how important this road article was to the Town. Johnson noted that Article 10 was the fall-back article if Article 9 doesn't pass. If it does then Article 10 would be withdrawn.

Johnson noted Article 11 needed some explanation and David Arnold of the Lake Association explained what the funds are used for from this customary article. Janssens motioned to recommend and Piedrafite seconded. All members were in agreement to recommend.

It was noted by Whitney that Article 16 in the warrant was still not worded correctly. Gagnon stated that they would need to put 2 ½ wording on this article before Town Meeting to give them a fighting chance for this to take place. He stated that he wanted to assist the presenters to get this done and that they could amend the article. He noted that it would be the same premise as the Briggs article. Johnson added that they would need the tax impact as well.

It was also noted that the cruiser article, number 19, would be passed over due to the motion earlier to cut this from the FY09 Budget. Johnson noted that he would have handouts for Article 20 and 21 and would talk about this at Town Meeting.

Article 24 was the Town Hall move and furniture article and a discussion followed on how to finance this. Boushell stated that he was asking for the support of both boards to re-appropriate funds in the fall on any surplus on the project. A discussion followed on the possible use of funds that would be remaining on this project.

Whitney stated that she couldn't support purchasing furniture with the payment of an \$18k plus cost for cabling as well. Johnson questioned the cost of DPW overtime which would be included in the moving costs and Boushell noted that this is a busy time of the year for the DPW. Gagnon stated that perhaps they could ask for some kind of consideration from the school on the improvements made in the temporary town offices at Oakmont and that they could meet with the School Committee regarding this possibility.

Johnson stated that he was leaning towards getting the furniture as he was comparing options. Gagnon stated that he wanted them to review the Town Hall project funds. A short discussion followed on this point.

Johnson noted that he would approve \$15k out of the Capital Improvement Fund and the \$10k already approved by the Advisory Board on this article for the move back. He added that this would be \$20k for furniture and \$5k for other expenses. He then noted that he could even go up to \$20k from Capital Improvement. Piedrafite noted that he would like to see an itemized list of costs on the project.

Janssens motioned to approve the \$10k voted on at the prior meeting and to appropriate an additional \$17.5k from the Capital Improvement Fund for the purpose of furnishing and moving Town Hall and was seconded by Zbikowski. It was a unanimous vote of the Advisory Board.

The Board of Selectmen noted that they would wait on their vote and Gagnon added that it would ultimately be up to the voters at Town Meeting.

A short discussion followed on Article 25 which was regarding the DPW trash "pay as you go" plan being proposed.

Janssens motioned to recommend Article 27, the School Override, and was seconded by Piedrafite. It was a unanimous vote by the Advisory Board.

Johnson then brought the discussion to the Reserve Fund Transfer submitted by the Library for \$7,915.60 worth of fuel oil. A short discussion followed. Lombardo motioned to approve the Reserve Fund Transfer for the Library and was seconded by Janssens. It was a unanimous vote by the Advisory Board.

Gagnon stated once again about his enthusiasm with the VMS Project noting that he felt good about the general public use of this building. He stated that he was in favor of this project and Whitney concurred. A short discussion followed on the potential use of the building.

At 10:00 p.m. it was unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator